

Spending, Ron Swanson-style

In Case You Missed It: Joe Wilson's Opinion Piece in Politico... America has a new champion of limited government and spending restraint. For six years straight, Ron Swanson, director of the City of Pawnee's Parks and Recreation Department, brought his agency in under budget. He set citywide records by spending only 60 cents of his department's discretionary fund.

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By: Rep. Joe Wilson

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America has a new champion of limited government and spending restraint. For six years straight, Ron Swanson, director of the City of Pawnee's Parks and Recreation Department, brought his agency in under budget. He set citywide records by spending only 60 cents of his department's discretionary fund.

Regrettably, Swanson is not running for Congress. Instead, he is leading the limited government fight as a fictional character on NBC's primetime show "Parks and Recreation."

Sure, Swanson has some bizarre ideas about how to save money — like implementing a Chuck E. Cheese-style token operation for city parks and selling City Hall and the zoo animals.

But in this current political environment, his outside-the-box thinking and enthusiasm on behalf of taxpayers are something lawmakers should absolutely DVR on Thursday nights.

Nontraditional approaches and proposals are crucial if we are going to stop Washington's spending spree.

One creative proposal is AmericaSpeakingOut.com, a Republican online forum that gives Americans a megaphone to amplify their voices and share policy ideas. Given voter frustration with business as usual in Washington, it would be no surprise if the volume were to reach a decibel that Washington liberals could no longer ignore.

YouCut, another creative GOP interactive initiative, engaged more than a half-million Americans in Washington's spending debate. In the first week, 280,000 people “voted” online and by cellphone to save \$2.5 billion a year by cutting the new nonreformed welfare program.

Unfortunately, Washington liberals turned a deaf ear to these Americans and voted this proposal down. Only nine Democrats joined with the 280,000 Americans to help stop spending money we do not have.

Only nine? It makes you wonder if the other 245 Democrats have failed to see the pictures of the riots in Greece — a result of overspending that led, in part, to its economic collapse. Flanked by the trillion-dollar government health care takeover, the \$789 billion so-called stimulus bill, and the bankrupt Cash for Clunkers programs, the United States could be headed down that same path.

Hard-working taxpayers already have given \$127 billion to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, yet the government mortgage giants are asking for more bailout money. The president promised that the health care bill would cost less than \$900 billion, yet a nonpartisan analysis recently revealed that the health care legislation will cost \$115 billion more than expected.

This revelation comes on the heels of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services report, highlighting how national health care costs will increase by \$311 billion over the next 10 years because of the health care legislation.

Coming up with new approaches to involve the American people directly in the political process is half the battle. To tackle this surging spending spree and put an end to cyclical broken promises, lawmakers must also offer substantive plans to scale back.

One such area lawmakers should consider is with the Department of Education and No Child Left Behind. That program has created incentives for states to weaken their standards, has provided too few students with school choice

opportunities and has encouraged teachers to “teach to the test”;

The best chance for giving each child the opportunity to live up to his or her greatest potential will come not from a Washington bureaucrat but from teachers, local school boards and parental involvement. Instead of spending \$64 billion on bureaucratic red tape at the Department of Education, we could give that money directly to local school boards.

Next, we can look at implementing a 5 percent, across-the-board spending cut for nondefense, discretionary spending. Implementing a balanced-budget amendment is another common-sense measure we could take to force Congress to live within its means and reduce the deficit.

Today, 49 out of 50 states have a balanced-budget requirement. It is high time for the federal government to have one, too.

The bottom line is we must get serious about Washington’s spending spree on a borrowed credit card before it is too late.

This means delivering more than just rhetoric and finally proposing solutions — even if they are outside the box — to get the conversation rolling, Ron Swanson-style.

Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) serves on the House Committee on Education and Labor.

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